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The Atomic Renaissance: the Emergence of American Mystery Writers

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Atomic Women

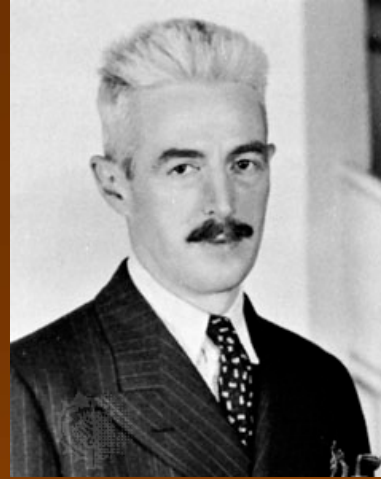
American Female Mystery Writers of the 1940s and 1950s

October 31, 2016

Beth Turcy Kilmarx, Curator of Rare Books

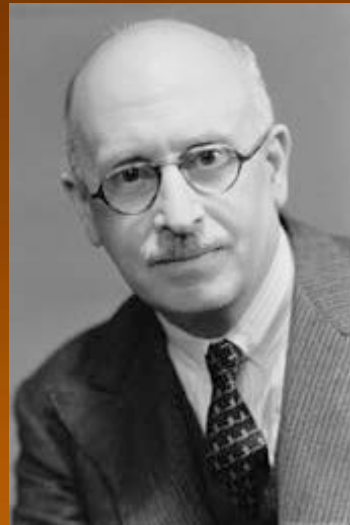
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Examples of the First Golden Age Mystery Writers



Clockwise from left:

Agatha Christie, Dashiell Hammett,
Earle Stanley Gardener,
Margery Allingham, Freeman Wills
Croft and Ngaio Marsh

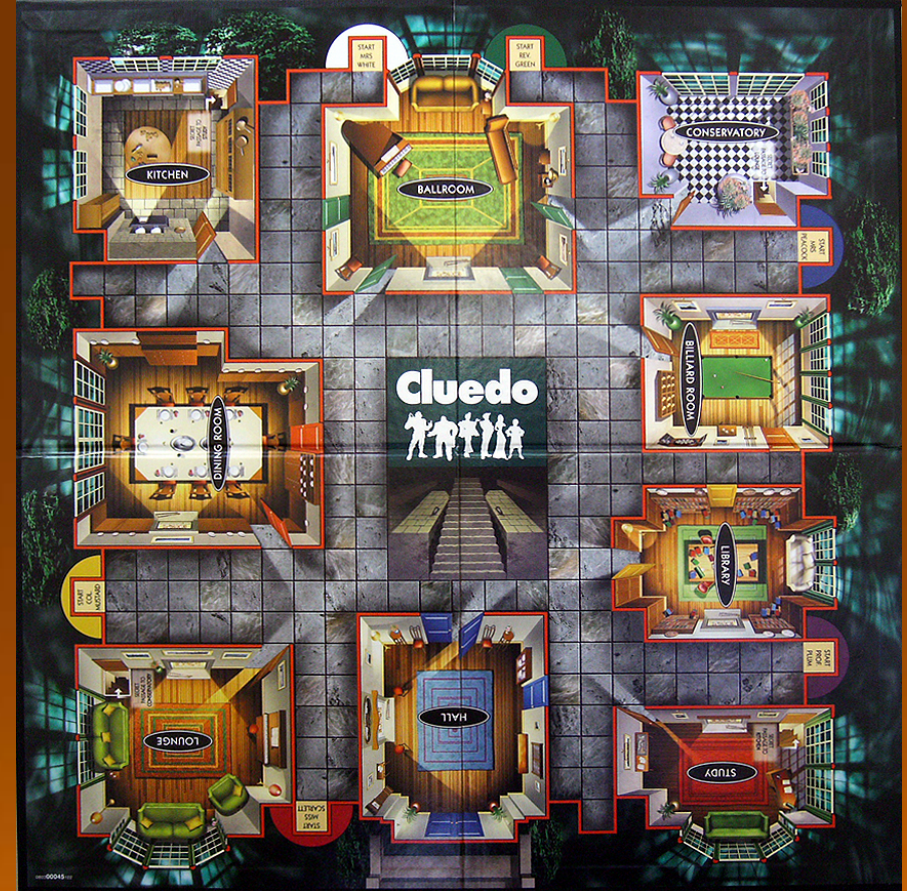
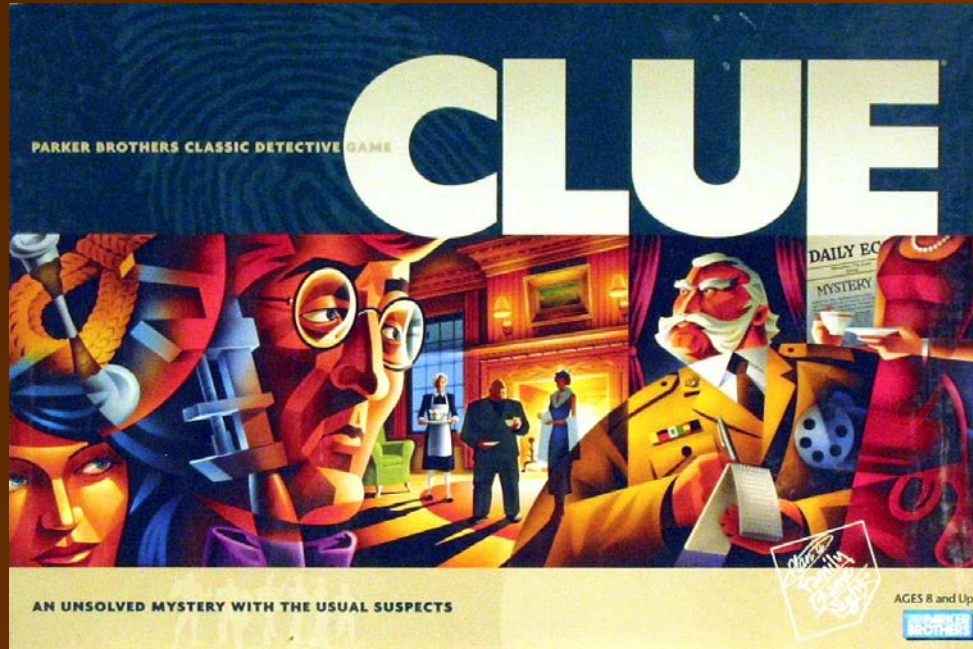


The First Golden Age of Mystery

1918 -1939

The traditional mystery story had:

- A Great Detective,
- A larger-than-life character,
- A deductive brain solved the puzzle.



Knox's Ten Commandments of Mystery

- The criminal must be mentioned in the early part of the story, but must not be anyone whose thoughts the reader has been allowed to know.
- All supernatural or preternatural agencies are ruled out as a matter of course.
- Not more than one secret room or passage is allowable.
- No hitherto undiscovered poisons may be used, nor any appliance which will need a long scientific explanation at the end.
- No Chinaman must figure in the story.
- No accident must ever help the detective, nor must he ever have an unaccountable intuition which proves to be right.
- The detective himself must not commit the crime.
- The detective is bound to declare any clues which he may discover.
- The "sidekick" of the detective, the Watson, must not conceal from the reader any thoughts which pass through his mind: his intelligence must be slightly, but very slightly, below that of the average reader.
- Twin brothers, and doubles generally, must not appear unless we have been duly prepared for them.

A similar but more detailed list of prerequisites was prepared by S. S. Van Dine in an article entitled "Twenty Rules for Writing Detective Stories" which appeared in The American Magazine in September 1928. They are commonly referred to as Van Dine's Commandments.

The Four Rules of Mystery

- there must be a crime
- the criminal must appear reasonably early in the story
- the author must be honest with the clues; the reader must know everything the protagonist knows
- the protagonist must make an effort to catch the criminal - the criminal must make an effort to avoid being caught

Ian Lancaster Fleming (1908 – 1964)



The Atomic Renaissance

1945 – 1960

Male Mystery Writers

Spy fiction and hard boiled private eyes

- Mickey Spillane
- Ed McBain
- Ross McDonald
- Ellery Queen

Female Mystery Writers

Psychological traumas, unusual places, and non-traditional protagonists

- Patricia Highsmith
- Margaret Millar
- Dorothy Sayers
- Charlotte Armstrong

Awards: Edgar Grand Master Award (1983)
Edgar Award for Best Novel (1956)
Derrick Murdoch Award (1986)

Nominations: Edgar Award for Best Novel



Margaret Millar
1915 – 1994

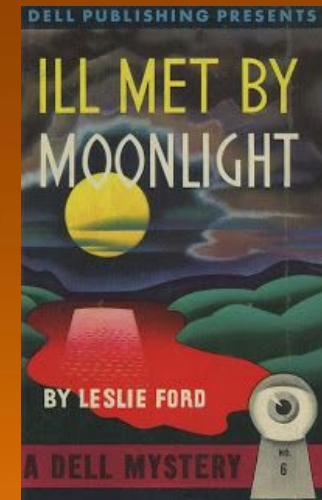
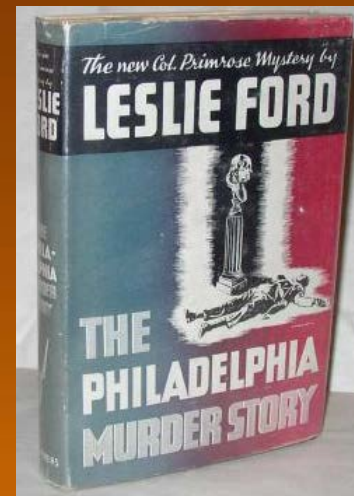
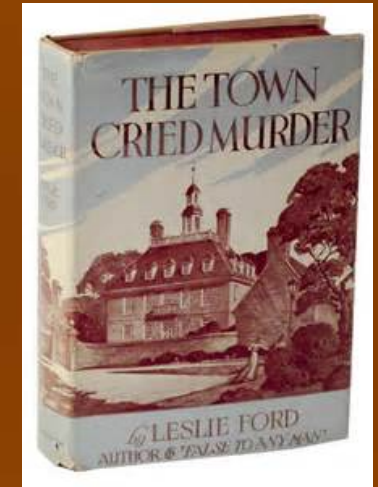
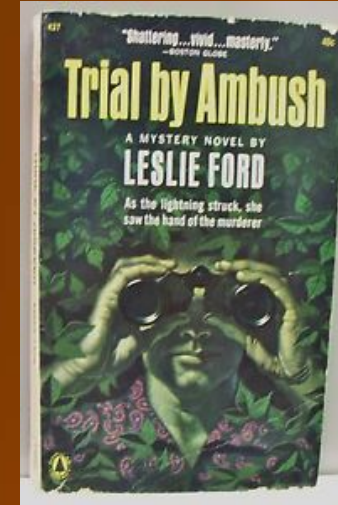
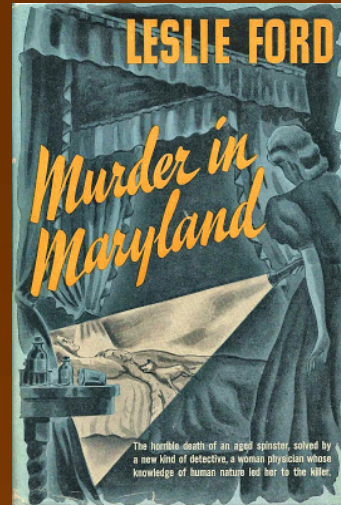


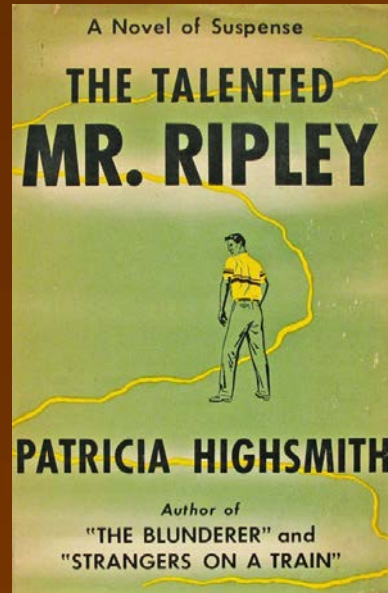
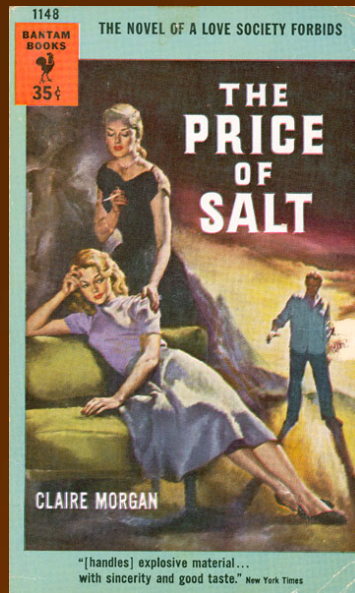
Edgar Award
Winner



Zenith Jones Brown
1898 – 1983

Pen names: Leslie Ford,
David Frome, Brenda Conrad





Patrica Highsmith
1921 - 1995

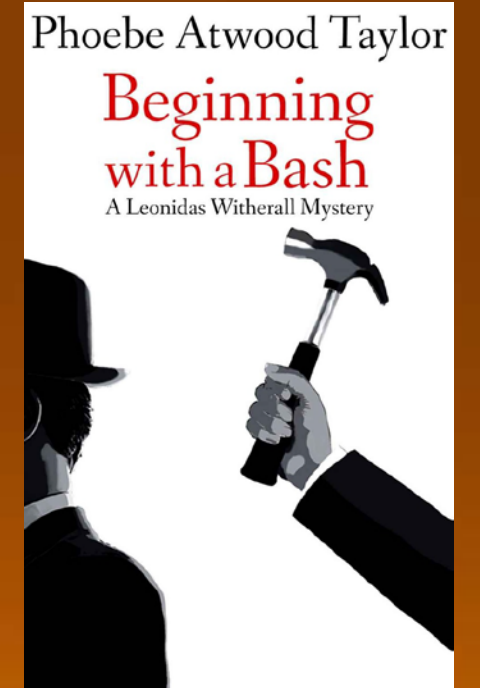
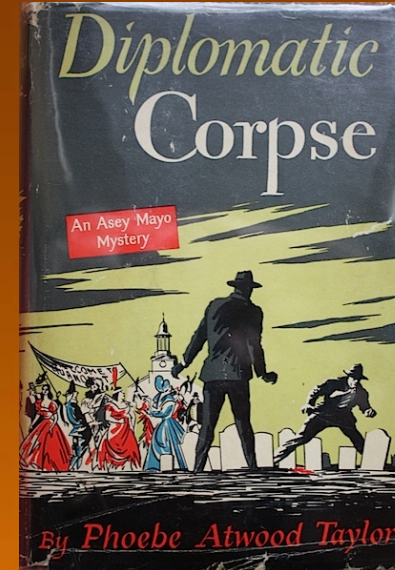
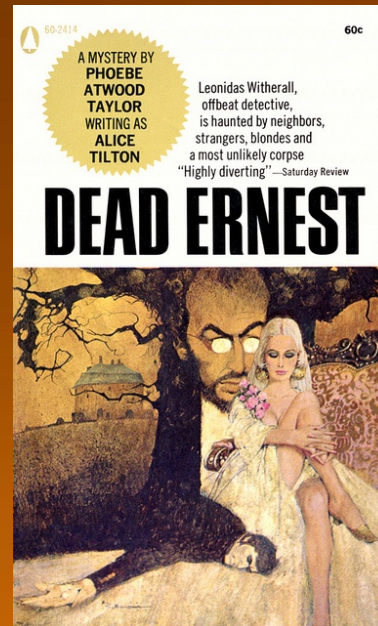
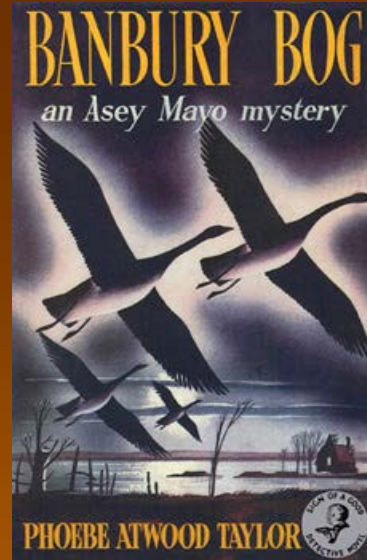
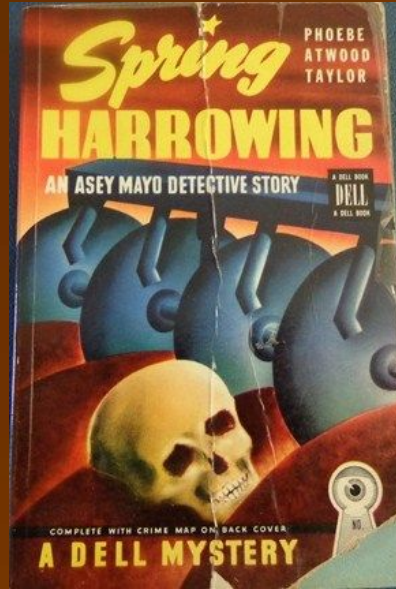
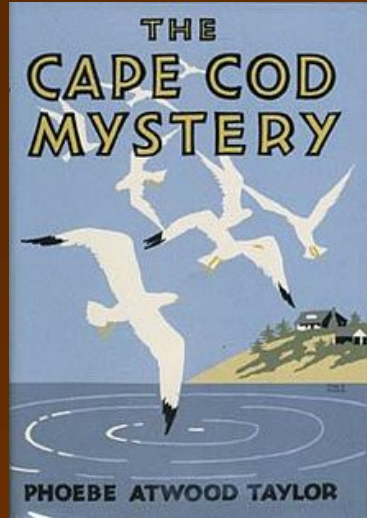


Awards

- 1946 : O. Henry Award "The Heroine" , best first story
- 1951 : Edgar Award nominee: Strangers on a Train
- 1956 : Edgar Award nominee: The Talented Mr. Ripley
- 1957 : Grand Prix de Littérature Policière: The Talented Mr. Ripley
- 1963 : Edgar Award nominee: "The Terrapin", best short story
- 1964 : Gold Dagger Award : The Two Faces of January
- 1975 : Grand Prix de l'Humour Noir: L'Amateur d'escargot
- 1990 : Chevalier dans l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres from the French Ministry of Culture



Phoebe Atwood Taylor
1909 - 1976



Crime Fiction

is divided into the detective story, the private eye, the crime story, and police procedural

- ***Detective Story*** the crime and its solution are the focus traditionally stars an amateur detective, has red herrings, wrongly accused people, shocking revelations that the least likely people did it
- ***Private Eye Story*** amateur detective replaced by a private eye Sir Arthur Conan Doyle credited with making this genre, from the Private Eye came the Hard-Boiled Detective story
- ***Hard-Boiled*** rough and rugged male detective, violence and language
- ***Soft-boiled*** pg-13ish rating
- ***Cozy*** often features a non-professional detective, murder often happens "off-stage"
- ***Chick Lit*** often feature strong independent women, chick lit mysteries have evolved
- ***Crime Story*** when the story is told by the criminal, usually doesn't end well
- ***Police Procedural*** a lot of focus on investigation process, often involves a police force not one individual person, plot driven instead character driven

Mystery Stories

divided into psychological suspense, thriller, whodunnit, and locked-room

- ***Psychological Suspense*** involves fear and dread, most verge on the brink of horror and supernatural
- ***Thriller*** often preceded by an appropriate adjective, emphasis usually on action, clear-cut good and bad guy, many close calls
- ***Whodunnit*** focus on solving a puzzle, making observations, logic, deduction, inference, locked room mysteries fall into this category but are more focused on how the crime was committed
- ***locked-room*** are like whodunnit but focus more on how a crime's committed

Second Golden Age of Mystery

1986 – early 1990s

The Sisters-in-Crime mission statement:

"To combat discrimination against women in the mystery field, educate publishers and the general public as to inequities in the treatment of female authors, raise the level of awareness of their contributions to the field, and promote the professional advancement of women who write mysteries."



Marcia Muller
Sharon McCone



Sara Paretsky
V.I. Warshawski



Sue Grafton
Kinsey Millhone

"Evil is not something superhuman, it's something less than human." Agatha Christie

"The detective isn't your main character, and neither is your villain. The main character is the corpse. The detective's job is to seek justice for the corpse. It's the corpse's story, first and foremost." Ross MacDonald

"there is nothing more deceptive than an obvious fact"
Sir Arthur Conan Doyle